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NON-ESSENTIALS IN THE TEACHING OF FIRST YEAR LATIN

Most of us who teach First Year Latin do so with the full knowledge that our pupils will read Caesar in their second year. Whether or not the Commentaries are the wisest possible requirement for second year work is beside the point. In the majority of Schools they *are* the requirement. It is a condition which we front, not a theory, a condition which produces for us the stiffest problem of the Latin course. I mean preparation for Caesar.

We have all experienced the amazing ignorance of a Caesar class in its first few weeks of study; many of us have wondered what teacher could possibly have prepared pupils so badly. Our wonder has ceased when Fortune has favored us with a class of our own teaching. We have then shifted our question to How can these boys and girls whom I prepared so well show such astonishing stupidity?

The problem of preparation for Caesar is not to be casually dismissed by a complaint about the work below the Secondary School, or about the futility of the text-book, or about the dullness or idleness of the pupils, or by any of the other excuses which we sometimes employ to explain a difficult situation. The teaching in the Grades may occasionally be inadequate; some text-books are better than others; some pupils are heavy and indifferent. Other conditions may be instanced to account partly for the weakness of pupils in the second year. Granting all this, I believe that we should all firmly ask ourselves the question, Are we really preparing in the first year for the thing that comes next, or are we struggling to teach matters which have no bearing on Caesar or which can be more effectively taught to a class actually reading Caesar? Are we holding closely to the essentials, or are we confusing our pupils and adding to our own burdens by presenting a multitude of non-essentials?

I know that 'in the high and far-off times' it was possible in one year to teach beginners practically everything that they would later need in their High School Latin reading. But consider. In those days that we sometimes regard so fondly, the High School course was a very different thing from that of to-day. The sciences had not come into their own; the teaching of commercial and industrial subjects was unknown; the department of English demanded no such amount of reading and writing as now; music and art were not

High School subjects; no attempt was made to provide for all the needs of all the pupils; only a selected few entered the Secondary School; in short the Cosmopolitan High School (monstrous phrase) and all that it implies did not exist.

Further, in the old times the extra-curricular activities formed no such overwhelming part of the day's work as now. Where were the debates, the musical organizations, the School publications, the clubs and societies in the interests of science, art, photography, music, the drama and more others than one can enumerate? Where were the various branches of athletics, one or more for each season? Where were the social activities that now take up so much of the time and thought of our pupils? Then, the boy had his school-work and little else in connection with his School. Now he has so much else that the weary teacher sometimes wonders to what extent the dog will be able to endure the tail's wagging.

We are living in another day, and whether we wholly approve or not is of little consequence. The fact remains. When we regard the enriching processes applied to our High Schools, the various School activities that may be termed extra-curricular, and the demands of society both in and out of our School buildings, there needs little proof, I think, that the Latin course must give, that methods that were effective when the High School work consisted of Latin, mathematics, Greek or German, a little English, a little history and a very little science, will not work out with the same result to-day. Without holding any brief for the old times or for the new, we must meet the situation and we must, to make our teaching effective, concern ourselves with the elimination of non-essentials.

What are the non-essentials? In trying to answer that question I shall run the risk of appearing dogmatic. I do not mean to be so. I am merely attempting partially to formulate my own confession of doubt. And if, in my doubt, I seem to criticize any text-book in common use, again I do not mean to do so. No opinion of mine is likely to deal a staggering blow to the book-trade; and you will surely all agree, if you agree at all to the principle of elimination, that our texts contain vastly more than the average class can assimilate, more than any teacher would attempt to present. Designed to meet every possible condition, they must be abridged for use. Otherwise we are but slaves of the book in hand, in which case the inexperienced teacher can meet

the difficulties of the first year's work practically as well as the experienced.

A wise maxim for Latin teachers is, Teach nothing to-day which can by any possibility be put off till to-morrow; and for those of the first year, Teach nothing that will not be needed in Caesar, and omit much of what will be needed there.

To be more specific, our non-essentials both of content and of method may be grouped under six heads: (1) non-essentials of vocabulary; (2) non-essentials of pronunciation; (3) irregular or alternative forms; (4) forms rarely or never found in Caesar; (5) forms which, common in Caesar, are best dealt with there; (6) non-essentials of syntax.

(1) Only words which are found with some frequency in the Commentaries and only so many of those as can be fully and accurately mastered by the class in hand should be attempted. More than this are non-essential or worse. A large vocabulary at the beginning of the second year is of great value, but a large vocabulary, vaguely known, is merely a source of difficulty. The acquisition of from 500 to 1000 words of a new language in from 8 to 10 months (besides never forgetting forms and syntax) is not easy; our danger here is in forcing the pupil to swallow more rapidly than he can digest.

(2) Concerning pronunciation there is room for a wider divergence of view. The old method of assigning a large number of rules for pronunciation, with the result that the pupil came to regard Latin pronunciation as difficult, was clearly wrong. It both wasted time and created a false impression. The briefest possible outline of the differences between the vowel and the consonant sounds of the Latin and those of the English, and the simplest possible statement of the principle of Latin accent are ample. After all, no one ever learned to pronounce a language by rule. It is by hearing and practising correct pronunciation that we pronounce correctly. By accuracy on the part of the teacher and by an occasional quiet correction of a badly sounded word, the matter will gradually adjust itself. And even if it never quite does so, the situation is, I suspect, not desperate.

Any insistence upon the marking of quantity, in the face of other problems, is the sheerest waste of time and effort. Pupils should be taught to note long quantities upon the printed page, particularly such as determine the forms of words; but the use of the macron in their own exercises is, I believe, a non-essential.

(3) With respect to irregular and alternative forms, little need be said. It is easy to avoid the dative and ablative plural of *dea* and *filia*; it is easy, also, to disregard the *-re* of the second singular passive, the *-re* of the perfect third plural active, the alternatives of the demonstrative *is*, and other such instances. Trifles all, they may be, but trifles multiplied become a burden; and, in dealing with form-work, it is well to strip it of everything that leads to vagueness or confusion.

(4) A considerable amount of material is commonly presented to beginners which never appears in Caesar or appears so infrequently as to be negligible. Under this head, if we honestly wish to prepare for Caesar, we must be willing to sacrifice the following time-hallowed features of first year work: the vocative case, the locative (except *domi* and *Romae*), neuters of the fourth declension (except *cornu*), all fifth declension nouns (except *dies* and *res*), noun stems (except in the third declension), personal pronouns of the first and second person, adjective pronouns (except *noster* and *suus*, and these should be called adjectives), numerals (except a limited number including the noun *milia*), imperatives, supines, defective verbs, impersonals, and all mention of dates.

For most of these omissions, the reasons are doubtless evident enough. For others, some attempt at defense or at least explanation may be worth while. For example, to teach cardinals and ordinals completely is too great a task to be worth the effort. They are better dealt with as they are met. The same is true of defective and impersonal verbs.

The inclusion of the imperative and the supine is often defended on the ground that they round out conjugation. There is small virtue in a rounded conjugation if it be rounded with material which will not be seen in reading for months, or whose use cannot be properly explained at the time when the forms are committed. How many of our Caesar pupils can give all of the imperatives of *amo*? Yet they knew them once. By insisting upon their learning such forms, we afford excellent practice in forgetting. To how many beginning students could you convey a real understanding of the supine, if it were worth while to do so? Would it not be wiser to call the fourth principal part a participle and the stem upon which it is formed the participial stem? Spend no time rounding out conjugations with non-essentials.

(5) When we have omitted all this, there are still left us a number of matters, which, though necessary in Caesar, cannot, for one reason or another, be effectively taught except to students reading Caesar. They are as honestly non-essential as the class just considered, but for a different reason. Will you grant me your indulgence while I name a list of such, with my reasons, briefly put, for including each?—interrogative pronouns (useless except for the indirect question; and even here a limited number of forms, say *quis*, *qui*, *quid* and the accusative singular, will suffice); gerunds, gerundives and periphrastics (difficult to explain in isolated sentences, comparatively easy to master when they frequently recur in connected discourse); the reflexive pronoun (at least to be postponed until late in the year because of the confusion between it and the demonstrative *is*); the indefinites (because of difficulties of meaning); participles, except in their simplest uses (because of the extreme difficulty of getting young students to comprehend the various values of the Latin participle). The reasons assigned for avoiding certain forms or for

emphasizing them but slightly, you will observe, are often syntactical reasons. Difficulty of syntax may be a sufficient excuse for avoiding a form which is not *per se* especially hard. The teaching of forms as such, without giving the student frequent opportunities to see them at work, does not pay.

I am confident that the absolutely necessary work of the first year, in vocabulary, in inflection and in syntax can be better done by ruthlessly cutting away all but the barest essentials of form and by vigorously concentrating upon these. The greatest fault of our first year teaching is diffuseness and indefiniteness, a tendency to sprawl over too wide a field.

(6) And now, without further discussion of form, let us consider our last class of non-essentials, those of syntax.

(a) *Noun Syntax*—Our teaching of declension is often faulty and tends to waste time. We often present formal declension before our class has an adequate idea of the sense of Latin cases.

Many of you will remember how in your own High School days, after some time spent upon rules of pronunciation and after trying to pronounce groups of words whose meaning you did not know, you were set the task of declining *stella*. You did it, though every case name except nominative was Greek to you.

Any approach to that method affords a perfect example of misapplied energy. No student should hear the word declension until he has been carefully introduced to each case, one at a time, not less than a full lesson on each, preferably more; the nominative as subject and as attribute, the accusative as direct object and as following *ad*, *in*, *per*, *trans*, the genitive as possessor, the dative as indirect object, and the ablative following *ab*, *de*, *ex*, *in*. Nor need he know the meaning of formal declension until he has been patiently led in this way through nouns of the first and second declensions. A vocabulary of serviceable words must be furnished him and he must be subjected to a ceaseless drill until the forms and the simplest uses of each case are absolutely his property.

What further uses of the various cases are to be taught must be determined by the needs of Caesar; and Mr. Byrne's little book, *The Syntax of High School Latin*, stands ready with its statistics to tell us those needs.

We shall probably agree fairly well that the following should be excluded from the work of the first year, no matter what text-book is in use: the genitives of material, value, and description and all genitives with verbs, the datives of possession, agent and reference, with especial care not to give a false impression concerning a wide application of the rule for datives with compounds; the adverbial and cognate accusatives, the accusative of exclamation, and the two accusatives with verbs of asking, etc.; the ablative of price and that with comparatives. Other ablatives may be omitted according to their difficulty or their infrequency in Caesar, if our class seems to have reached the point of satura-

tion. Even the ablative absolute, commonest of all in Caesar, may be safely left to the second year, where its very frequency makes it easy. Further than that, its omission simplifies the work with participles.

It is well to remember that it is not the number of uses of a given case that we teach which counts in the end, but the completeness with which we teach such uses as we present at all. The pupil must not be overfed. Many text-books, by presenting new constructions too rapidly, get us into trouble. A student who has made the acquaintance of the ablative of specification on Monday cannot do justice to the dative of purpose on Tuesday. He must have time to grow familiar with the former. Further, when a construction has been thoroughly taught, it should not thereafter be allowed to lapse, for so it will soon fade into the limbo of things forgotten. It must be constantly brought to mind in review; and with each new construction the teacher should line up all previous uses of the case which it illustrates. Eternal vigilance is the price of certainty. There is no virtue in merely covering ground. Intensive teaching of a comparatively few things is a better answer to our difficulties.

(b) *Verb Syntax*—What has been said in a general way of noun syntax applies as well to verb syntax. We tend to teach too much, notably in the case of the subjunctive. I am not fully convinced that the subjunctive mode belongs in the first year at all. Perhaps the dependent uses of the indicative—simple relative clauses, simple conditions, clauses with *quod*, *ubi*, and others—would furnish sufficient material for work in complex sentences. I *am* convinced that independent subjunctives should be relegated to the third year, and that dependent subjunctives, if taught to beginners at all, should, owing to the wide range of meanings for this mode, be taught as a whole. By that I mean that all subjunctive introductories to be used during the year should be presented together, with the proper translation of the mode to fit each introductory.

Suppose that the first subjunctive offered in your book is purpose with *ut*. The pupil learns 'that he may', 'that he might'. Later come verbs of fearing, 'that he will', 'that he would'. Still later come the uses of *cum*. You have all heard, 'since he may', and 'when he might', and like absurdities. Becoming a little accustomed to one use, the pupil tends to translate other subjunctives by the same model. This might be avoided by presenting the subjunctive as a unit or as nearly so as such a difficult and complex subject can be presented to the first year student.

If subjunctives are to be taught, their number should be limited, according to the ability of the class. The selection for use should, perhaps, be the clauses of purpose and result (substantive and adverbial in each instance), *cum* temporal and the indirect question. To these, if conditions permit, may be added fearing clauses, though relatively unimportant, and the causal and concessive clauses with *cum*. The teaching of subjunctive conditions in the first year is indefensible, as indeed

is the teaching of any condition, unless, from the complete omission of the subjunctive, there arises a need for material for the complete sentence. *Quin* clauses, proviso, and the various time clauses, excepting the *cum* clause, are too burdensome for the first year.

The result of such a determined pruning away of useless or over-difficult subjunctives will, I am certain, be a far quicker and surer knowledge of this troublesome mode than that attained by our usual straggling method of presentation.

The same holds true in a lesser degree of the infinitive. Its three essential uses, as substantive, as complement, and with the accusative subject, should be presented together. The pupil should come as early as possible to see the infinitive or any other mode as a whole. Such a result cannot be reached by teaching it in disconnected sections.

The point which I am trying to make in all this is that in our Schools as at present organized it is impossible, in one year, to teach the average beginning class all that they will need for Caesar in the way of form and syntax, just as we admit that we cannot teach them a complete Caesar vocabulary. We swamp the pupil with syntax and drown him with forms. We hasten from construction to construction until we blur the outline of each mode and obscure the values of the various cases. A slow and painstaking advance at first makes for rapid progress later on. At the first sign of indefiniteness, it is the part of wisdom to stop and review forms, to gather up the loose ends of syntax and pin them in place by means of definite tables of syntax brought up to date and provided with abundant examples from Caesar. A note-book is a very present help, and additional illustrative sentences are a necessity.

This brings me to the matter of reading for the first year. Some of our text-books break down just at this point. The sentences are too few or too hard or both. On taking up a new construction, 25 illustrative sentences of the briefest are more effective than the same number of long ones containing numerous other points than the one in hand. The thing illustrated should be so outstanding that the dullest boy cannot miss it. And in general, sentences for class use during the first half-year should be short and each should contain few constructions that differ widely from the English. When you find that only two or three of your brightest have puzzled out the meaning of some sentence, be assured that the sentence is out of place at that particular stage of the pupils' progress and waste no time upon its intricacies.

From time to time short exercises of connected discourse should be introduced. These should progress, that is, should be of increasing difficulty as the year advances. When the meaning is mastered, such exercises may be the basis of a thorough review of form and syntax; but for practice, day in and day out, comparatively simple sentences are more valuable.

Toward the close of the year, when work in form and syntax should grow lighter, exercises of connected dis-

course should be more frequent and of increasing difficulty. Their purpose is two-fold, to review inflection and construction, and to lay the ground-work for the gentle art of translation. The bulk of the second year's work is translation. Surely the pupil should come to his task with some preparation for the thing that is of prime importance. Isolated sentences give inadequate preparation for reading connected narrative; therefore brief narrative selections are almost imperative.

Have you ever had the experience that in examination or in written tests the work in translation is notably poorer than in answers depending solely upon memory? And has it ever occurred to you that by reducing the latter kind of work to its lowest terms, time and opportunity might be gained for really teaching the former? Give a boy vocabulary, forms and a measure of syntax and you cannot be sure that he will translate Caesar well. Indeed the chances are that he will not, for translation is difficult and must be taught, not left to the student's own haphazard methods. If we expend all or most of our energy in drilling upon memory work, how are we to train the faculty of imagination so necessary to the translator? How are we to develop a feeling for the language, or, at least, the beginnings of such a feeling? How should Caesar or any other Latin author seem anything but lifeless words?

Most of us have torn our hair over the English-Latin sentences that our pupils give us. It is no such serious matter. The exercises provided are often too difficult. Our pupils will never write anything that Caesar would recognize as Latin prose. The value of such work is only in fixing form and construction. Fret not yourself over incorrect order, nor agonize if a boy cannot write accurately a future less vivid condition upon which have been ingeniously grafted indirect statement, the genitive of the whole, three ablatives, a declinable numeral, the neuter comparative of an adjective and the superlative of an irregular adverb.

Perhaps I am laying myself open to the charge of expecting and requiring too little. I shall not deny very vigorously the harsh impeachment. I had rather expect comparatively little and get it than look for more and still get the little.

I appreciate some of the objections to any plan that proposes the excision of any considerable part of the work ordinarily presented in the first year, and I realize the difficulties of putting into effect any sweeping changes.

It may be said that such omissions and changes will leave the pupil confused as to what is important and what relatively unimportant. This is true unless a class is frankly told that certain matters discussed in the text-book are to be cut in the interest of a surer preparation for the work of the second year. Then, if attention is more vigorously directed to the portions retained, I believe that pupils will have a *more* definite idea of what is expected of them rather than a *less* definite one.

There is the old objection that the work of the first year will be incomplete and choppy. It is already incomplete; and, worse than that, it is hazy. If we fail in doing much that we try to do, and if, by our failure, we add weariness and discouragement to the other trials of the beginner, what have we won by our efforts at completeness? To do a limited amount of memory work accurately, to lay the foundations for translating Caesar, and to keep the pupil still hopeful and interested are, it seems to me, more desirable than even our best results when we aim at fullness of preparation.

Some one will surely say that wide changes in the content of our work and in our method will entail an enormous amount of labor upon the teacher. That is perfectly true. It will mean the omission of whole lessons and of parts of lessons, the preparation of many additional exercises, the modifying of much explanatory matter, a vast deal of dictation, the keeping of a notebook, the planning of extra material to be mimeographed and placed in the hands of the pupils, a constant anticipation of the work of the next day and of the next week and month. But much of this drudgery, once done, will serve for years. And the result, I have no manner of doubt, will be a measure of freedom from drudgery of another sort, from worry and from the dissatisfied feeling that we are not arriving at the desired end or are arriving through the expenditure of a disproportionate amount of energy. In the end the labor will pay.

What to me is the most serious objection and one almost insurmountable lies in the fact that it is difficult to get teachers to agree to any considerable omissions or to stick to their agreement. The ruling passion, to try to do everything, is strong. And even when a teacher is wholly convinced of the need of change, he cannot fairly test his theories, because, in a large School at least, his pupils in their second year may pass to other teachers who are not in sympathy with his ideas. There then arise difficulty and confusion of all sorts, omissions never quite made good, the repetition of matters already adequately taught, and a consequent increase of effort and loss of time. Still, in the face of such difficulties, I believe that each teacher of first year work can easily find many pet non-essentials which may be omitted to the advantage of the preparation for the reading of Caesar.

I may have given the impression that I advocate the permanent omission of important material. Nothing could be farther from my meaning. Subjunctives, periphrastics, gerunds, impersonals, indefinites and the many other matters mentioned must be taught. I am concerning myself with the work of the first year; and my contention is that in the School of to-day many of these things are not and cannot be well taught to the average class. I believe that it is the experience of most of us that subjects only dimly known in the first year easily become clear when considered farther on in the course. Whether the work is to be done by gradu-

ally expanded syntax tables, by review of form and syntax, or in connection with the work in Latin prose, it is not within the scope of the present paper to consider.

The question, I believe, will not be satisfactorily answered until we arrive at a somewhat radical rearrangement of the course for the second as well as for the first year. That rearrangement, I venture to hope, is not far off.

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REVIEWS

C. Iuli Caesaris Commentarii Rerum in Gallia Gestarum VII. A. Hirti Commentarius VIII. Edited by T. Rice Holmes. Oxford: at the Clarendon Press (1914). Pp. xlvi + 462. \$2.90.

This book is a very important addition to the equipment of the teacher of Caesar, as well as to that of the general reader. "It is intended", we are told in the Preface, "not only for teachers and pupils, but also for general readers who may wish to become acquainted with Caesar's masterpiece and for scholars who have not time or inclination to read my larger books". Mr. Holmes might have added a third class—those who find the large books inaccessible by reason of the price. This variety of aim has affected in no small degree the character of the book, particularly of the commentary, which combines notes intended for beginners with those which would appeal more to the mature student. This is the more remarkable, as an edition of the separate books for young pupils is also issued by the same publishers.

The Preface should be read by every teacher of Latin, whether in High School or in College, for it contains some very sound criticism of some of our present day tendencies. Thus Mr. Holmes says:

It is now usual in English schools to read the classics in snippets, partly, I suppose, in order that boys may become acquainted with many authors before they leave school. But by following this plan they cannot become intimate with any. One may read Macaulay's essay on Clive with profit even if one ignores all the others; but to read the ninth chapter of his History of England would not be wise. Moreover, there is no reason, apart from the consideration of what subjects are most remunerative, why Caesar should only be used as an elementary text-book. It cannot be read with the maximum of profit by a young boy, and it ought to be read rapidly through, at least once, by the highest form in the school. Apart from the mere interpretation of the Latin, which requires far more scholarship than is commonly supposed, the book demands, for its full comprehension, at least such an elementary knowledge of Roman History as may be acquired from the late Professor Pelham's masterly Outlines. Further it demands intelligence sufficiently developed to understand the exposition of ethnological, social, religious and political questions.

I imagine that not all of our teachers will measure up to the standard here set, and I am also quite sure that not all of our College teachers of Latin have read the Commentaries "rapidly through, at least once".